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The Watergate Caper-Mitchell Deposition Weisberg 9/6/72

The Post's story is on page 21, headed "Democrats Called in Watergate Case", a rather odd head for the testimony of Mr. Republican. This is considerable less prominence and less than half the space given to a Karnow rehash, and a very uncritical one for a by-lined story, of Jack Anderson's yesterday column. Karnow is faithful to Anderson and the CIA, not mentioned Southeast Asia and repeating South Asia, which is quite different.

There is almost nothing on Mitchell in the story. It says that Rothblatt has filed the intention of deposing ten leading Democrats.

Mitchell is quoted: "that the news media has 'blown out of all proportion'". Also, "Neither the President nor anyone at the White House or anyone in authority at the committee working for his reelection have any responsibility". The outs and evasions in this need no pointing out. It amounts to an admission of involvement on all levels and places.

It is inferior to the TV reporting of last night, where Mitchell's embarrassment was visible on two networks that I saw and I'm confident was on ABC, its correspondent being the one who asked that embarrassing question avoided by both by-liners on the Post.

This is one of the better examples of news management and one of the poorer examples of Democratic competence or better examples of their inept handling of the entire thing.

While Dole's false and obviously contrived charges against the Democrats was reported, what I heard on radio I don't see; the Manckiewicz response that those Heffner charges and others had been looked into and discarded as invalid by the GAO before Dole made them. He accompanied this to a comment on the Nixon-Chotiner relationship of the past and the well known Chotiner approach of attacking when defense is called for and can't be made.

The question Sam Donaldson (ABC) asked is isn't the general responsible for his troops? Weren't you in charge when this happened? Mitchell long paused. Then he asked "Would you mind rephrasing that?" He seemed to mean repeat. When Donaldson started, Mitchell also started talk and on TV it was all cross-talk, with Mitchell stopping and Donaldson continuing the rephrasing. Mitchell's response is quoted directly only in part by AP's B wire today: "If people act without authority, then there is clearly no responsibility of the people in command and control." Lil notes the inconsistency in the redundancy that she correctly says is not redundancy, having an entirely different meaning, "control". It is almost an involuntary admission that he was in "control".

Mitchell (B wire) is quoted as saying he answered all questions asked and Rothblatt as confirming. I do not recall having seen earlier that Rothblatt was attending the depositions. I presume it is proper. He represents those most likely to be charged, arrested already.

In earlier memos I believe I indicated the feeling that the Democrats are flubbing this and I could add are letting the Republicans steal the ball. One of the first indications that I found really troubling is the list of those Williams intended deposing. The omission of Colson, Mullem and Bennett is hard to understand in a political suit. With Hunt working for both? Yet Wong, of whom no more than a recommendation is known, was deposed? I think others also should have been included, so this made me wonder.